



THOMAS SUNDAY **CHRIST IS RISEN!**

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

On this Sunday of the Doubting Thomas, the disciple who could not believe in the Lord's resurrection until he had seen and touched the Lord's wounds, we should reflect on and evaluate our own degree of faith, or faithlessness, as the case might be.

For example, how often have we watched the evening news or checked the internet news, or looked at a newspaper, with all the violence and injustice in the world (which seems to be daily increasing) and in frustration we may have asked, why isn't God doing something about this mess? Why do wicked and dishonest people prosper? Why do they get elected to congress or the White House? Well, that's not a new feeling, and it directly addresses the question of faith. A prophet named Habakkuk felt that same way around 620 B.C., and he wrote a book about it.

The Prophet Habakkuk is considered one of the "minor" prophets (although I hasten to add that St. John Maximovitch always insisted that there are NO "minor" prophets of the Old Testament—that way of speaking, he said, is a western, academic way of thinking). This prophet's book is not only in the Old Testament but part of it is *also* found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, suggesting an extra degree of importance. The central message of the Book of Habakkuk is that "the just shall live by faith" (2:4). This of course is exactly what St. Paul also said in his Epistle to the Romans (1:17), and in Galatians (3:11), and it is also found in the Epistle to the Hebrews (10:38).

Habakkuk by sculptor Donatello



We are to live by faith. And if we have no faith, or very weak faith, then we are scarcely living, though we may think otherwise.

Habakkuk's name means to "embrace" or "wrestle." I think he was given this name because he had to wrestle with a difficult issue, the same one we often wrestle with today: If God is good, then why is there evil in the world? And if there has to be evil, then why do the evil prosper? What on earth is God doing?

There is a book about Habakkuk by Warren Wiersbe entitled called *From Worry to Worship*. Or what others have called "*From Fear to Faith*." You see, while Habakkuk started out by worrying about the world around him and God's apparent indifference, he ended by worshipping God and expressing his firm faith. There is, in his life, a clear progression from doubting God to trusting God.

Habakkuk's question is like ours today: he was outraged at the violence and injustice in his world and he described it in some detail in his book. Amazingly, his description sounds very much like our culture and society today in the western world. But then he learns that the Lord God is in fact *doing something*: He's raising up a foreign army, the Babylonians, to invade and destroy Israel because of its sins! He tells Habakkuk that the Babylonians are actually much more wicked than the Jews are. He, God, will hold the Babylonians accountable for their sins, but first the Lord intends to use them for His own purposes: to purge and purify and punish Israel.

I don't think I know anyone today who hasn't been praying for our country and western civilization in general, which used to be a thorough-going Christian civilization. Sometimes it feels like God isn't paying attention to our prayers. And yet, look again at the news. Look at the rise of militant and violent Islam. Look at our collapsing economy. Think for a moment about what all of this by itself is doing to our country and to the world, and how it appears to be getting even worse.

Can we really say that God isn't answering our prayers?

This shows us something important: God always hears our prayers, but sometimes the answer is "No," and sometimes the answers He gives us aren't the answers we were wanting. And when that happens, we fall into the error of concluding that He wasn't listening to us after all. When it seems that wickedness and injustice isn't being corrected on our own schedule, we suppose that it's never going to happen. This demonstrates how weak our faith actually is, for God has revealed in the Scriptures that He is a God of truth, justice, and goodness, and that He finds sin and evil to be an abomination that cries out to heaven for vengeance. Therefore, we must endure and strengthen our weak faith with the virtue of hope, just as the prisoner of war survives only by living on his hope that he will one day escape or be liberated.

In the second chapter of the Book of Habakkuk the Lord says, "The righteous will live by faith." Faith means, first of all, "what" you believe. And then it means *acting* on what you believe, *living* according to your faith. This is why we speak of our Orthodox Faith as "a way of life"—not just something we do on Sundays, or when we have Bible study, but a faith that transforms us, from the inside out, and makes us different from the people we were when we started this walk of faith, a faith that accompanies us throughout each and every day, regardless of the task we are engaged in.

Thus, we learn from the Prophet Habakkuk that even when God doesn't *seem* to be acting, He actually is. Just as He was allowing the Babylonians to prepare to conquer Israel—which would achieve His purpose of cleansing and chastising the Jews—in the same way God is preparing something now, for the dying Christian civilization and culture in which we live.

Some of us *might* even have a clue as to *what* it might be that He's preparing, but I'll say no more about that now.

Secondly we learn that God is all-holy and all-pure and cannot abide evil of any kind or any sort. If we can realize this, it will sober us up in our own personal lives when it comes to dealing with our own temptations and bad habits.

Thirdly, God *does* hear and answer our prayers. Always. But sometimes He gives us very unexpected answers to our prayers.

And finally, God commands us to live by faith. In other words, no matter how troubling the times, no matter how difficult or even confusing our own private lives may be, we must hold tightly to the truth that God is good, and just; He hears our prayers, and we must live accordingly.

So, on this Sunday of the Doubting Thomas, we have a tremendous lesson in the Gospel reading. As we heard in the Gospel account, Thomas finally sees the Lord and His wounds and falls at his feet, saying, "My Lord and my God!" And Jesus answers, saying, "You believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe."

That, brothers and sisters, applies to us.

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.